



VSTA Response to the 2019-20 Proposed VSB Budget April 23, 2019

I. Introduction:

The VSTA would like to thank Trustees and staff for this opportunity to respond to the proposals contained in the 2019-2020 Operating Fund Budget: Preliminary Draft Document.

We want to acknowledge the behemoth task that is before VSB staff and Trustees in creating a balanced budget. We also want to acknowledge that the deep cuts of the last 19 years have yet to be reversed, but we know that staff and Trustees are looking for ways to improve the learning conditions of our students and the working conditions of our teachers.

To situate this budget development process in the broader context of school funding in Vancouver, we note that as presented, we are attempting to find approximately \$4M to fund a range of one-time and ongoing proposals brought forward by staff through their consultations with managers and stakeholders. We remind Trustees of the motion brought forward by former trustee Bercic and passed by the Board last spring calling on the government to stop funding elite private schools. These level II schools in Vancouver alone continue to receive more than \$16M from public funds annually and give out charitable receipts in excess of \$27M. Meanwhile, 90% of our members who responded to our budget survey said that they spend their own money at least once a year in order to enhance the classroom experience for their students.

In terms of operating funds at the school level, including both flex funds and school generated funds, our members report of a wide range of practice and transparency. We would like to work with the Board to create a standard set of expectations for staff oversight on school-based finances. There remain questions about film generated revenue and systemic equity.

We will respond to some of the specific proposals and offer some additional considerations.

II. Response to Budget Proposals for Consideration

i. One-time proposals

- **Development of Capital Asset Management Plan** – we support staff and Trustees having access to expert advice regarding how best to manage the VSB's Capital Assets. Please see our comment below regarding proposals that are designated as contingent upon capital asset revenue generation projects.
- **Data Validation Review** – we are supportive of this as many of our members are skeptical of the projected enrolment data. With community trust, it is easier to make decisions.
- **Essential Furniture Replacement Plan** – we are supportive of this. Our budget survey indicated that aging equipment/furniture is of concern to many of our members.

- **Free & Accessible Menstrual Products in Schools** – we hope that the Province will fund this as opposed to downloading the cost onto School boards. Our Association is supportive of this and in fact brought a motion to the BCTF Representative Assembly asking the BCTF to lobby for this.

We note that some of these proposals are to be funded from the proceeds of a capital asset revenue generation project. We are curious to know if there is a specific project in mind? If so, what is it? If this project does not materialize, what will happen to these proposals?

ii. Ongoing proposals

- **Peoplesoft payroll consolidation** – Peoplesoft has been an expensive undertaking for the District. Has there been a cost/benefit analysis of keeping it or replacing it?
- **Digital communications Coordinator** – we would like to understand more what the goal of this position is – is the Board hoping to attract private school students to the public system? Who are we telling these stories for/to? Is this connected to the discussion from the last Advocacy Committee meeting where we discussed general advocacy for public education?
- **District Resource Teacher: Mentoring Support** – the VSTA supports the Teacher Mentor program. We would like to see it go beyond just Early Career Teachers however. We would like to see it expanded to “new to role” teachers as well.
- **Diversity/Anti-Racism District Resource Teacher Position** – the VSTA supports additional staffing to the Diversity teacher complement. We continue to be concerned about the process by which this position was created, but are in full support of the position itself.
- **Increase School Flex Budget Allocation by 5%** - we are supportive of any increase to Flex budgets. Many of our members spend their own money on classroom supplies.
 To wit (from our budget survey): *I am provided \$1.51 /student/month to teacher Food Studies. In a class of 28, I have \$42.28/month to buy sufficient groceries to teach a cooking course. Food costs have increased drastically and instead of increasing our funding, we have experienced a claw back. [...] Student pay between \$30-\$45, depending on the course level. **The students at the senior level fund their program at three times the amount the Board funds it.***

In addition, we note that while Flex funding as a whole last year was increased by 5%, program support funding to schools was increased by only 1%. We would welcome the opportunity to provide input regarding how any increase in Flex funds is distributed to schools and departments.

- **Increase Teacher Staffing International Education** – we are supportive of staffing ELL/International Students at 20:1, as per the restored language. These are often vulnerable students who will benefit from more support.
- **International Education Program Coordinator** – see above.
- **Mental Health, Wellbeing and Engagement Strategy** – the VSTA recognizes that mental health wellbeing is integral to a stable system. Our members are experiencing more severe violence on the job and other mental health challenges in the workplace with which they need support.

- **Replace Obsolete Student Technology** – we are supportive. We would like teacher voice and input into the decision making. For example, not all of our members want laptops, many secondary sites prefer a stable computer lab as opposed to carts etc.

Regarding the proposed Potential Budget Sources of Funding:

- **Business Development Manager** – we support ‘good fit’ opportunities to raise operating capital for the District. If this position is implemented, we would hope that a reasonable time frame is provided before an assessment is made regarding its effectiveness. We note that budgeting for district generated revenue is challenging if the funds are budgeted to cover expenses in the year in which they are raised. We also note that the allocation of district generated revenue can raise equity issues. In light of these observations, we would welcome the opportunity to participate in any policy or procedure development that might occur to support this position.
- **Increase in School Supplies Fees** – while we recognize that the school district is not funded adequately enough to supply students with what they need in the classroom, we are concerned about equity (see comment above in the Flex Budget section).

III. Additional Considerations

Despite the Classroom Enhancement Fund (CEF), it appears that we have over 40 courses at the secondary level that should have had a section added, which in turn, would have reduced teacher workload and generated less Remedy. We are hoping that fewer classes will be generating Remedy next year in the goal of driving down class size and supporting more students. We would rather have Ministry money spent on direct student support then generate Remedy.

We would ask that the Board ensure that there are adequate funds to support psycho-ed testing – given the proposed “Prevalence” funding model in the Funding Model Review paper, we are concerned about the total delinking of funds to support for students with additional needs. We would not ask a GP to treat a complex medical issue on their own without specialist support – why would we ask a generalist classroom teacher to support a student with complex learning needs without specialist support?

IV. And finally, in Secondary Teachers’ own words (from our Budget survey)

On deferred maintenance:

- *Deferred maintenance...mice in the school*
- *Ageing computer technology, carpets that are 40-50 years old, leaking and moldy infrastructure puddles every time it rains!*
- *I have watched a pane of broken glass held by tape for over a year. This pane of glass is on top of the cafeteria. How is this acceptable any other workplace or school in Canada?*
- *Upkeep of theatres - they are often booked for filming and other outside of the school performances and that won't be true if they are no longer usable.*
- *My equipment has been maintained in a timely manner when repairs have been needed.*

What they would like to see considered in the Budget:

- *ADST TOC's and funding to upgrading and maintaining the shops in the district.*
- *Review fee schedule for Ceramics courses. Consumables are expensive and kilns are expensive to repair and maintain. The fees should be increased.*
- *Upgrading to support climate change issues -lighting, gardening, waste management, water, student involvement.*
- *More money for resources especially in Libraries. Inquiry based curriculums need RESOURCES!*
- *VSB directive to require all school ELL funds to be used exclusively for ELL teaching staff hiring, classroom resources and teacher expenses including field trips for newcomers.*
- *Increase in non-enrolling blocks to sufficiently support staff, admin, students and parents*
- *PLEASE hire more indigenous enhancement teachers. There aren't enough for us to be able to reliably plan lessons with their involvement, and some schools do not have enough access time for students. Also, essential to review/revise how funding for SpEd programs is allocated in terms of more realistic time (6 out of 8 blocks, enrolling/2 non-enrolling blocks) for teachers who have a caseload of up to 15 (or more) students with IEPs to manage in addition to their teaching duties. TOO much to try and balance all the duties without extra time during the day --- and with an increasing array of students with truly exceptional needs and behaviours.*